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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY POL/ECON REPORT - APRIL 26, 2007

¶1. The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk.

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CIVIL SOCIETY

¶2. Opposition Leaders Warned for March 25 Demonstration

Minsk city authorities on April 22 issued official warnings to organizers of the March 25 opposition demonstration after allegedly receiving "a number of complaints" from Minsk residents. De facto coalition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich, Belarusian National Front (BNF) Leader Vintsuk Vyachorka, United Civic Party (UCP) Deputy Head Igor Shinkarik, and Belarusian Social-Democratic Party "Gramada" acting Head Anatoliy Levkovich were accused of holding an unsanctioned demonstration that interrupted pedestrian and vehicle traffic, hampered retail operations, and littered city streets. In their warning, authorities threatened punitive measures against the leaders if they attempted to hold other unauthorized demonstrations. Shinkarik called the authorities' warning an intimidation and blackmail tactic and demanded authorities show him the citizens' alleged complaints.

¶3. Parliament Adopts Changes to Political Party and NGO Law

On April 20, the Belarusian National Assembly unanimously approved amendments to the political party and NGO laws that would reportedly ease registration and re-registration procedures for political parties and NGOs. The national commission, responsible for

reviewing registration applications, will be liquidated, leaving the Ministry of Justice the single registration agency. According to the new amendments, only state-owned organizations will be allowed to use the word "academy" in their names or award scientific degrees and academic titles.

14. Pro-Democratic Historians to Establish an NGO

Radio Liberty reported on April 25 that 30 Belarusian independent historians held a founding convention to establish the "Association of Free Historians". Prominent historians and civil society activists, including Nina Stuzhinskaya, Tatyana Protko, Sergey Tarasov, and Igor Kuznetsov, discussed the current situation with historical studies in Belarus and prepared the necessary documents for registration. Tarasov doubted the NGO would be registered, adding that it could be established as an affiliate of an international organization.

15. Political Prisoner's Mother Dismissed from School

Vitebsk regional authorities on April 21 dismissed Tatyana Severinets from her Russian language and literature teaching position at a village school. Severinets, mother of jailed Malady Front leader Pavel Severinets, was fired for "unexcused absences" when she was on approved leave without pay to visit relatives in Minsk and attend an education seminar in Poland. Students and parents unsuccessfully petitioned authorities to reverse the decision.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT

16. Belarusian Imports Exceeded Exports

According to an April 23 report by the Ministry of Economy, in January-February Belarus' foreign trade deficit was USD 466 million. The volume of foreign trade rose on the year by 113.3 percent, including a 103.5 percent increase in exports and 123.7 percent rise in imports. Belarus' main trade partners were Russia (48 percent), Germany (7 percent), Netherlands (6 percent), Ukraine (5.9 percent), Poland (4 percent), GB (2.7 percent), USA (2.4 percent) and China (2.3 percent).

DOMESTIC ECONOMY

17. Income Increase Spent on Goods and Services

On April 23, the Ministry of Statistics announced that Belarusians' total money income on March 1 increased 16.8 percent on the year to USD 3.87 billion. In the same period, Belarusian's total spending and savings grew to USD 3.92 billion, 77.3 percent of which was spent on goods and services and 7.4 percent went into savings. Currently, the average monthly salary in Belarus is USD 287 and the average monthly pension is USD 130.

18. National Bank Reports Low Cash Supply

The National Bank on April 23 announced that in January-February, consumer prices rose 2.6 percent while the country's money supply decreased 6.7 percent. By March 1, cash in circulation accounted for 22.5 percent of the money supply compared to 24 percent on the same date in 2006.

19. Energy and Alcohol Belarus' Breadwinners

According to the Ministry of Statistics' April 20 press announcement, 15 state-owned businesses accounted for one-third of Belarus' USD 11.1 billion national budget revenues. Among the greatest contributors to the budget were Belarus' two oil refineries, Beltransgaz, regional electric power supply utilities, Belaruskaliy fertilizer producer, Belarusian Steel Factory, the country's leading alcohol producer, and principal mobile phone service provider.

10. QUOTE OF THE WEEK

On April 22, Ruslan Prymak, deputy chief of the prison where

opposition leader Aleksadr Kozulin is being held, reported on Kozulin's condition and made the following request:

"Reduce the volume of letters sent to Kozulin, as it was hard for the censor to read all of that."

Stewart